

Rennellese language

Rennell-Bellona, or **Rennellese**, is a Polynesian language spoken in the Rennell and Bellona Province of the Solomon Islands. A dictionary of the language has been published.^[1]

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Rennellese	
Rennell-Bellona	
Native to	Solomon Islands
Native speakers	4,400 (1999) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian <ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rennellese
Dialects	Munggava (Mugaba, Rennell) <div>Mungiki (Mugiki, Bellona)</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	mnv
Glottolog	renn1242 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/renn1242) ^[2]

Introduction

History

Rennellese, also known as Rennell or Bellonese is only one of the many languages in the Pacific, that is spoken in the Central Solomon Islands; mainly the Rennell and Bellona Islands (Jonsson, 1999). For a great deal of time the Solomon Islands were occupied by the British, and pidgin English had become the main language spoken in the Rennell and Bellona Islands, until World War II. At that time the Rennell and Bellona Islands were a battlefield during the Battle of Midway, between the Japanese and Americans; just like Hawaii. During the battle the Japanese occupied most of the area using it as a base. After World War II had ended, both Rennell and Bellona were still being held by allied forces, until finally gaining independence in 1978 (Levinson, 279-280). Both islands have been working to develop their own government, and Rennellese has been recognized as the official language (Monberg, 2012).

Population

The Solomon Islands have a population of around 940,000 (in 2016), including 658,000 in the independent state of the Solomon Islands; and only a little over 4000 of these people speak Rennellese. Natives who currently live there refer to themselves as Mungiki for the Bellona Islands and Mugaba for the Rennell Islands, and among the younger generation Avaiki is used to reference both. Ethnic groups in these islands are very widespread and distinct (Ember, 2002). The people of the Rennell and Bellona Islands live in small village communities, with each group having its own culture, and religious practices (Levinson, 284-285). As for government issues, the Solomon Islands as a whole is divided, the islands to the northwest (primarily Bougainville and Buka) belonging to Papua New Guinea, while the rest of the Solomons are their own independent government. Even the Rennell and Bellona Islands alone have their own provincial government known as REN-BEL, the recognizes Rennellese/Bellonese as its own language.

Phonology

Consonants

	<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n	ŋ	
<u>Plosive</u>	p	t	k ʔg	
<u>Fricative</u>	β	s	ɣ	h
<u>Sonorant</u>		l		

Consonants

The consonants of Rennellese consist of /H, K, L, M, N, P, S, T, V, NG, GH, NNG/. The letters /P, T, K/ are regular stops, /B, GH, H, S/ are the fricatives, /M, N, NG/ are the nasals, /L/ is the only lateral, and finally /G/ as a pre-nasal (Elbert, 1988).

Vowels

The 5 vowels in the system are /a, e, i, o, u/. Rennellese possess /'/ which is a glottal stop used to lengthen vowel sounds. The /'/ can be written before or after the vowel it is lengthening, similar to an English apostrophe (Elbert 1988).

Syllable Structure

The typical syllable structure in Rennellese is (C)V. Rennellese favors vowels when making syllables, and not many consonant clusters (Elbert 1988).

Grammar

Basic word order

The traditional word order for Rennellese is VSO, but more commonly among younger generations, SVO word order is used. Researchers speculate that this is due to outside influences from missionaries and World War II (Elbert, 1981). The use of either word order is usually dependent on the person speaking, or whom that person may be speaking with. Both statements and questions may have different ways of being expressed solely based on who the speaker is (Monberg 2011).

Rennellese's morphology is polysynthetic, meaning it has a near-infinite number of morphemes that can be put into a word. Not only can some words have many morphemes, but the range between the amounts is high as well.

Reduplication

Many words in Rennellese use either whole or partial reduplication. Reduplication serves three main purposes in Rennellese: pluralization, making a word more specific or changing the whole word.

- agha, vine; agha-agma, vines

Vocabulary

Indigenous Words

- "Au" I
- "buka" book
- "'agiki" chief
- "poo'ugi" dark
- "kai" eat
- "peti" fat
- "penu" garbage
- "tongahiti" black people

Loan Words

Due to Rennellese long contact with the English language there are a few loan words from English still used today.

Endangerment

Materials

There are many valuable resources that have been created to help maintain the language including a dictionary, and multiple books primarily written by Samuel H. Elbert. Mr. Elbert along with a few other researchers even dedicated an entire website to the people of Rennell and Bellona called Bellona.dk. Rennellese is also the official language of Rennell and Bellona Province. With an official status in their country, the Rennellese have begun opening schools and other domains for the language to be used. The only problem is that some of these materials are from the 1960s-1990s, and are old and hard to come by.

Vitality

Rennellese is classified as a developing language. The number of speakers is only about 4,000 but there is use and intergenerational transmission of the language, allowing it to grow. Rennellese is used as a first language by the majority of the people of Rennell and Bellona. It serves many purposes, being used in education, business, and socializing (Ember 2002). In the long term, Rennellese may be able to see further growth if more technological material is made to both preserve and spread the language.

Further reading

- Levinson D. (1998). *Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook*: Greenwood Publishing Press.
- Jonsson N. (1999). Rennellese Language fact sheet. Retrieved from <http://www2.ling.su.se/pollinet/facts/ren.html>.
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- Moseley, Christopher and R. E. Asher, ed. *The Atlas of the Languages of the World* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 100

References

1. Rennellese (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mnv/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Rennell-Bellona" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/renn1242>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.

External links

- Rennell-Bellona lexical database with English glosses archived with Kaipuleohone
- Scans of notebooks with data on Rennellese language
- Materials on Rennell-Bellona are included in the open access Arthur Capell collections (AC1 (<http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/AC1>) and AC2 (<http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/AC2>)) held by Paradisec.

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